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WHY I WANT MY BOY TO BE A FARMER/1

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I have a son now 7 years old, and I hope when he grows up that he will decide to be a farmer. We have also three daughters, and we hope that when they grow up they will marry farmers. In order that they may learn a little of farm life during childhood and have the training in character that the care of farm animals affords, we moved out of the city 3 years ago onto a small farm near the University of Maryland, for we want our children to have a thorough training in science and sociology, as well as farm experience, before they undertake the serious work of life.

/1 The second of two addresses given by Dr. Baker at the Farmers' and Farm Women's Convention, North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering, Raleigh, on August 4, 1938. This address is a revision of one entitled "Farming as a Life Work" (Ext. Serv. Circ. 224), given at the Rural Youth Conference, University of Illinois, Urbana, on April 27, 1935.

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FIVE REASONS WHY I WANT MY BOY TO BE A FARMER

You may wonder why in these hard times for agriculture we should wish our children to become farmers or farmers' wives. May I tell you?

1. The farmer and his family have more and better food to eat than have most city people, and in times of depression they are more certain of a livelihood - if they have not mortgaged the farm. About six million people went from the cities back to the farms during the years 1930-34 seeking shelter and sustenance, and two million of these were still on farms when the census was taken January 1, 1935.

2. The farmer has better health than the city man and lives longer - 4 to 5 years longer - according to a recent study made by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. If the farming people had equal medical facilities, the difference in duration of life would be still greater.

3. The farmer becomes a wealthier man than the majority of city men, judging from the per capita wealth of rural and urban States. This may not be true in the South. It is true in the North because of the millions of city people who have almost no property at all - except an automobile and some second-hand furniture.

4. The farmer is more likely to enjoy his work than are most city people. Most city work is monotonous - tending a machine in a factory, operating a typewriter, standing behind a counter in a retail store hour after hour. The farm boy or girl may dream of a professional career in the city, or of being a successful business man or woman, but it is certain that relatively few young people from the farms will realize this ambition. Most of the young men and women who go to the cities will continue to do the simple tasks of city life - if they find work at all.

5. The farmer is more likely to rear a family and promote the welfare of the Nation and the race. The family is becoming smaller and weaker in the cities. Only two-thirds to three-fourths enough children are now being born in our large cities to maintain their population permanently without accessions from outside. The conditions of living and the philosophy of life in the cities tend toward the extinction of urban families. The rural philosophy of life, with its recognition of the family as the fundamental economic as well as social institution, tends toward survival. If there is one word that science teaches to be more important than any other it is the word "survive."

I cannot minimize the difficulties facing the farmers of the United States. The approach of a stationary and probably later declining population suggests a long period of low prices for farm products. The message I hope you can give to the boys and girls whom you talk with on your return home is that the prospect for becoming rich through farming is not bright, but the opportunity to serve their Nation and civilization is, in my opinion, greater than it has ever been. I would that they could see the rural people

as the conservers of the traditions, the literature, the art, and, it may prove, of the science that has accumulated during the centuries. I would that they could see above them, like a cloud of witnesses, the farmers and farm women of the past, their ancestors for a thousand years, heroes and heroines many of them. If modern civilization is to preserve its strength, the young people must, I believe, see the beauty of the river of life; they must realize that the individual is only a link in an endless chain which reaches back through geologic ages. I would that they could see in front of them the opportunity to build not a transitory urban but a permanent rural civilization; a civilization not founded on selfishness as the motivating principle but on cooperation, in which the economic objective is to produce sufficient for everyone while conserving the natural resources, and in which the social objective is service and preservation of the strength of the people.

May I now elaborate somewhat the five reasons just given why I want my boy to be a farmer.

1. The Farmer Has Better Food

Dr. Hazel K. Stiebeling, one of the Nation's authorities on nutrition, makes the following statement: "A much higher proportion of families of farm operators have diets that can be called good from the standpoint of nutritive value than do families living in villages, small cities, large cities, or metropolitan areas. This is the conclusion reached by the United States Bureau of Home Economics after an intensive study (still unpublished) of the food supply in 1936 of some 5,000 native-born unbroken families who were not receiving relief. This relationship was found to exist in the North, South, East, and West.

"Whether or not a farm family enjoys a diet that can be rated good nutritionally was found to depend quite as often upon the scope and success of its program of food production for family use as upon its money income. A good diet includes generous quantities of milk, butter, eggs, green leafy vegetables, and fruit. These foods cost the farm family an investment of capital, time, and energy. But to the city dweller they are even more expensive, since retail prices cover not only the costs of production but also the expenses and profits of the persons engaged in bringing these foods from the farm to the city kitchen."/2

/2 Stiebeling, Hazel K., U. S. Bureau of Home Economics, in a letter to the writer, July 1938.
Earlier studies made by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of 2,400 farm families, and by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of 12,000 workingmen's families in the cities indicated that the farm families were consuming about 50 percent more protein, and much more calcium, phosphorus, and iron than the standard ration necessary for good nutrition, while the workingmen's families had barely enough protein and had a deficiency of calcium, phosphorus, and iron. The farm families ate 50 to 100 percent more meat, eggs, milk, and vegetables

During times of economic depression and unemployment, like the present, the advantage of farm families in this matter of food supply is even more striking. Millions of men and women in the cities today would not know how to provide food for themselves and their children if public relief should stop, while thousands of transients, wholly without means, are walking the streets, many slowly declining in strength and courage. On the other hand, studies made of Illinois and Wisconsin farm families indicated an improvement in diet during the depression./3 Among the Illinois families the estimated value of food consumed per family, after allowance is made for change in price level, rose from about $390 in 1930 to nearly $490 in 1931 and 1932; among the Wisconsin families the increase was from $490 in 1929 to $540 in 1933. Cash expended for food, however, declined notably, while the farm furnished much more food than before the depression. In Wisconsin, and presumably in Illinois, the increase in dairy products, beef and pork, potatoes, and tomatoes furnished by the farm was notable; but a decrease occurred in use of eggs (more sold for cash), purchased bread, bananas, and oranges. The farmers substituted home-produced for much purchased food, had a better diet, and saved money.

Contributions to the church declined in Illinois about 40 percent between 1930 and 1932, but in Wisconsin only 25 percent between 1929 and 1933. Expenditures on education were reduced about 60 percent in Illinois in the 2 years, but in Wisconsin the decline was very small. Expenditures for health were reduced 35 percent in Illinois and nearly 50 percent in Wisconsin, but payment for insurance increased in Wisconsin. Automobile expenses were cut more than half in both Illinois and Wisconsin, and recreation expenditures 75 percent in Illinois, but only 50 percent in Wisconsin. It appears that Wisconsin farmers lowered their level of living less than did Illinois farmers, but whether the decline in the farmers' level of living was greater than that of city people is not known. Probably it was greater, except for food, than among the rich and upper middle class in the cities, and less than among the poor in the cities. For the fourth or fifth of the city people of working age who were unemployed, the decline undoubtedly was much greater than among the farmers.

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than did the workingmen's families, which depended more on cereals. It is clear, therefore, that the farm families were, in general, well provided with vitamins, whereas the diet of the workingmen's families was usually deficient in this regard. Of course the people with larger incomes in the cities eat more adequate food, but the majority of farm families, if they moved to town, undoubtedly would be found in the workingmen's class. See Kirkpatrick, Ellis Love. The Farmer's Standard of Living. 299 pp., illus. New York and London c1929 . (See pp. 90-95.)

/3 Freeman, Ruth Crawford. Living Expenditures of a Group of Illinois Farm Families, 1930, 1931, 1932. Ill. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bull. 406. pp. 365-406 illus. Urbana, 1934. (See p. 399.)
Kirkpatrick, E. L.; Tough, Rosalind; and Cowles, May L. How Farm families Meet the Emergency. Wis. Agr. Expt. Sta. Research Bull. 126. 40 pp., illus. Madison. 1935. (See particularly Appendix, table E.)

With regard to the house, the studies made in 1931 by the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership indicated that the farmhouses had more rooms than the city houses but had fewer modern conveniences./4 The survey of the United States Bureau of Home Economics in 1934, which included over 600,000 farmhouses, indicated that only 12 percent had a bathtub, 17 percent running water, 27 percent kitchen sink with drain, 27 percent refrigreation (3 percent mechanical), 18 percent electric light, 21 percent a power washing machine, but only 8 percent central heat./5 These are among the great lacks in farm life - home conveniences and comforts.

2. The Farmer Lives Longer

Despite the poor sanitary facilities in the average farm home, probably there is less sickness among the farming population than among the city population, and there is statistical evidence that the duration of life is longer. Dr. Dorn, statistician of the United States Public Health Service, on the basis of an extensive survey under the auspices of that agency, makes this statement:

"Regardless of the manner in which ill health is measured, rural residents possess definite advantages over urban residents. For a few diseases, the superior medical and health facilities available to city dwellers have partially compensated for unhealthful environmental conditions. If equivalent care and attention were readily available to rural residents, it is probable that the existing differences would be increased."/6 Dr. Dorn also notes that in New York State where hospital facilities have been "fairly adequate for several years", admissions because of mental diseases have been two-thirds greater from urban than from rural territory.

Relative to duration of life, the statisticians of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company estimate, primarily on the basis of the vital statistics reported by the Federal Census, that in 1930 the rural white boy baby at birth could expect to live to be 62 years old, whereas the urban white boy baby would live to be less than 57. For girl babies the corresponding figures are 65 and 61 years./7 For young people 20 years of age, who have survived the dangers of infancy and youth, the expectation of life

/4 The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. Farm and Village Housing, prepared by Bruce L. Melvin. pp. 4-18. Washington, D. C., 1932.

/5 Bureau of Home Economics. 1934. Data yet unpublished.

/6 Dorn, Harold F. The Relative Amount of Ill-Health in Rural and Urban Communities. Public Health Reports, Vol. 53, No. 28, p. 1193. July 15, 1938.

/7 Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., Statistical Bulletin, Vol. 16, No. 7 (July 1935), p. 2. See also Dublin, Louis I. and Lotka, Alfred K. Length of Life. New York, 1936; and Dorn, Harold F. cited above. The distinction between rural and urban is drawn in the vital statistics of the Census Bureau at places of 10,000 population, not 2,500, as in the census of population.

for the rural white male is 48 years and for the urban 44, for the rural white female 50 years and for the urban 47 years. In other words the new-born child is likely to live 4 or 5 years longer if he lives his life on a farm than he would in a city, and young people 20 years of age are likely to live 3 or 4 years longer in the country than in the city. At all ages from 10 to 40 the rural expectation of life is about 4 years longer than the urban for males and 3 years longer for females.

3. The Farmer Accumulates More Wealth

The third point is that farm people, although their incomes are smaller, accumulate more property than do most city people. This statement is difficult to prove because of lack of statistics bearing directly on the point, but the following facts indicate its probability:

(a) The States with the highest per capita wealth, according to the estimates of the National Industrial Conference Board, are dominately rural States - Nevada, with $5,913 in 1930, leading, followed by Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa, and Montana./8 These are the only States having a per capita wealth exceeding $4,000. The States having a wealth exceeding $3,500 per person, but less than $4,000 were Oregon, Idaho, Nebraska, and North Dakota, all dominantly rural. On the other hand, the smallest per capita wealth was in the Southern States, also dominantly rural. In the South, however, the Negro is a large factor, and the low fertility of much of the soil is another important factor. In the North per capita wealth exceeded $3,000 in every dominantly agricultural State except Missouri, Maine, and Vermont, and was less than $3,000 in most of the industrial States. What has happened during the depression is not fully known; but it is doubtful if farm property has fallen as greatly in value as has city property. The assessed valuation of real estate in Chicago, for example, dropped from about $5,000,000,000 in 1929 to $2,000,000,000 in 1933. One-half of the real estate of Chicago changed hands as a result of mortgage debt foreclosure proceedings between 1929 and 1934./9

(b) But a large proportion of farm property in the Nation is owned by city people. About 46 percent of the value of farm real estate was in tenant and manager operated farms in 1935 and in land rented to "part-owners," most of which is probably owned by city or town residents. The mortgage debt on farms operated by their owners amounted to 15 percent of the value of all farm real estate. The equity of farm operators in farm real estate was only 39 percent. However, the distribution of urban wealth is even more concentrated than rural wealth. Apparently 80 percent, possibly

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/8 National Industrial Conference Board. The Conf. Bd. Bull. No. 62, p. 496, Feb. 20, 1932.

/9 Hoyt, Homer. One Hundred Years of Land Values in Chicago: the Relationship of the Growth of Chicago to the Rise in Its Land Values, 1830-1933. 519 pp. 1933. (See p. 272.)

90 percent, of the people own less than 10 percent of the property in the cities./10 On the other hand, if mortgaged farms are a fair sample of all farms, and they probably are, 80 percent of the farmers owned 45 percent of the farm property according to the 1925 Census (no allowance for debt in either case). It would seem safe to say that the distribution of wealth is at least fourfold more equable in the farm population than in the city population. This conclusion is confirmed by a study of probated estates made about a decade ago by the Federal Trade Commission./11

Briefly, the situation may be summarized by saying that there is the possibility that a young man or woman who moves from the farm to the city may become many times richer, but there is a strong probability that he or she will die poorer in the city than on the farm. Wealth in the city is in no small measure the result of chance, a gamble by millions of people for big stakes in which a few thousand win. Wealth in the country, on the other hand, is normally the result of hard work, managerial ability, and thrift./12

/10 King, W. I. The Wealth and Income of the People of the United States. 278 pp., illus. New York. 1915. (Percentage estimated from fig. 26, p. 227.) A more recent estimate of Dr. King's for 1928 indicates that 1 percent of the "income receivers" owned 37 percent of the private wealth of the Nation, and that 3 percent owned 49 percent of the wealth.

/11 Federal Trade Commission. National Wealth and Income. 381 pp., illus. U. S. 69th Cong. 1st Sess. S. Doc. 126, Washington, D. C. 1926. (See p. 60.)

/12 The extensive survey of income and expenditures made in 1936 by the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Home Economics, Department of Agriculture, show that farm families begin to increase "net worth" at an income level (money and nonmoney) of $1,000 to $1,200 (varying with size of family, color, etc.), and that at an income level of $4,000 about half goes into savings or increased inventory expenditures rising very slowly beyond the $2,000 level. The preliminary report offers this explanation: "It appears that after a given point in the income scale is reached, average expenditure might increase very little, if at all, with increase in income. The charts showing the division of farm-family income display this tendency toward an upper level of expenditures. This phenomenon has been observed before, but only in surveys of farm families confined to limited areas. Such a tendency to an upper limit of the farm family's level of living has been attributed to various causes, among them the competition between the family and the farm business (or other form of investment) for the available income; the lack of opportunity in the rural environment for conspicuous consumption, and for increasing expenditure for cultural development; and even the essential democracy and lack of class distinction in a rural community. It is possible, moreover, that after several years of depression, and, in some localities, drought, the tendency toward limiting expenditures in order to pay debts may have been unusually pronounced."

4. The Farmer May Enjoy His Work

For the farmer who realizes the significance of his work, I believe there is no occupation that affords more substantial enjoyment. Perhaps no occupation affords greater opportunity for the exercise of scientific knowledge, especially of biology. The farmer deals with life - plant life, animal life, and human life. Crops are planted and harvested year after year. Individual plants die and disappear, but the production of wheat and corn and cotton goes on without end. The farmer raises horses and cattle, hogs, sheep, and chickens, and appreciates the importance of good stock and of the laws of inheritance.

Agriculture is based on the process of reproduction, and this continuity of life. The farmer is constantly dealing with this eternally renewed life. It is a life that is subject to modification, however, as witness the dairy cow, whose production of milk has been increased twofold, possibly threefold, within a century. Think what contributions to human welfare have been made by a relatively few farmers in the development of the modern breeds of beef and dairy cattle, horses, swine, sheep, and poultry. The farmer is the heir of the ages, with an opportunity, through animal breeding particularly, to benefit all the ages to come./13

5. The Farmer Has a Fuller Home Life

It is this knowledge of and respect for life that is one reason, I believe, why farm people emphasize home life. Did it ever seem strange to you that nearly all departments of domestic science or home economics in State universities were originally established in connection with the agricultural college rather than with the college of arts and science, or of engineering; that at Farmers' Week in the agricultural colleges there are courses for the women and children as well as for the men? Why are such courses not offered in connection with meetings of lawyers, doctors, and ministers? Agriculture is a family affair. Now, home life is the great need of the Nation today, and I want our boy and girls to live among people who realize the importance of home life.

RURAL AND URBAN PHILOSOPHIES

Deeper, in my opinion,/14 than the difference in attitudes of people holding to individualistic economics and to socialism are those between

/13 Since this address was given a much more adequate discussion from the philosophical standpoint - The Land and Human Values, by Leo R. Ward - has been published in the August 1938 issue of The Catholic Rural Life Bulletin, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 2-4, 18. This is a paper well worth reading.

/14 I should explain that the Department of Agriculture has no policy, no attitude even, in many matters I am discussing. It is necessary first to smelt out the facts, weld these facts by conflict of opinion into a philosophy, and work out that philosophy into a program. My objective is to help to start this democratic process.

rural and urban attitudes toward life. The farmer, as I have just noted, tends to think in terms of plants and animals, of birth and growth and death. The city man, on the other hand, tends to think in terms of wheels and levers and machines, or of buying and selling. Whereas agriculture is founded on life processes, particularly as influenced by soil and weather and the laws of inheritance, urban occupations are founded on manufacturing and commerce, and the activities are mostly carried on indoors. To the city child milk is associated with a bottle, not with a cow; an apple comes from a box, not from a tree; and these early impressions influence, I believe, the ideas of later life.

As a consequence the farmer's philosophy of life is primarily organic, whereas the city man's philosophy usually is mechanistic. The farmer lives in a natural world, the city man chiefly in an artificial world. Because of his occupation the farmer's thoughts are largely biological, though in our modern commercial agriculture it is becoming increasingly economic, whereas the city man's thoughts are largely physical or economic. In farming, the family is the economic and social unit, it is difficult to farm without a wife, and children can help with the work from about 10 years of age onward. In the cities, on the other hand, the individual is the economic unit, a wife adds little, if anything, to the family income unless she works outside the home, in which case it is difficult to rear a family, and children involve expense, with little if any tangible return, from birth till marriage. It costs generally two to three times as much money to rear a child in the city as it does on the farm.

Perhaps because of the open air, and the contact with nature, perhaps because the farmer sees the stars at night and observes the progress of the seasons, perhaps also because of stronger family ties, farmers and farm women tend to think of the past and the future; city people, it seems to me, tend to think more about the present. Thrift has been called into question by many city people today; the workday, it is urged, should be shortened to 6 hours so that everyone will be employed, and children by some are considered a luxury to be indulged in only by people of ample means. Granting that thrift may be carried too far, that all should work who are able, and that parents should feel a keen sense of responsibility in bringing children into the world, the fact remains that the philosophy of life which is popular in the cities today leads to the disintegration of the family and may, I fear, lead to national and social decline.

Family Continuity in Farming

Five years ago I attended a conference of agricultural economists in Germany, and for a week before and a week after the conference our German hosts arranged for a few of us to visit German farms. At each farm we visited we were provided with a page or two of mimeographed information about the farm. Most of the mimeographed sheet told of the acreage of the crops, yield per acre, fertilizer used, crop rotations, number of horses, cattle, milk cows, swine, chickens, etc., but always at the top of the page for those farms which could claim the honor, - and half of them could -

was a statement somewhat as follows, "This farm has been in the family 300 years." Some farms had been in the family for 400 years, some 500 years; one farm had been in the family since the eleventh century. As I considered what had happened during these centuries - the periods of inflation and deflation, the wars and revolutions, and all the other vicissitudes of history - the thought came to me, how long ago would this family have lost its wealth had it been invested in anything else than land. And then, as I recalled that the birth rate in Berlin was only about half sufficient at that time to maintain the population of the city stationary without accessions from outside, the further thought came to me, if all the youth of this family had moved to the city, how long ago would it have died out.

The farm in Germany is typically considered a heritage from the past, an "Erbhof" or hereditary home, to be passed on from father to son for as long as the family line remains intact. In southern Germany the farms were until recently, generally divided among the children, as in the United States, one son usually buying out the others and getting into debt to do so; but in northern Germany it is customary, to avoid debt and too small farms, to pass on the farm to one child, frequently the youngest son, the older son having gone to the city to make his way. All the children have the right to return to the farm in time of distress for shelter and sustenance. There is some injustice in this system to the "yielding heirs" in cases when the estate consists of little more than the farm; but, at least prior to the recent Erbhof legislation, these injustices were usually ameliorated by adjustments among the heirs.

This concept of the farm as the hereditary home of the family has profound consequences. I saw practically no soil erosion in Germany, except in the vineyards on the steep slopes of the Rhine Valley. This is owing partly to the cool summer climate, with few torrential rains, partly to the crops grown, but partly also, and perhaps primarily, to the conviction that the land is the foundation of the family - the heritage from the past to be handed on to the next generation undiminished in fertility, and, if possible, with its productivity increased. I could sense among the German farmers, or Bauern, as they are called, the feeling that a man who let his land erode was not only dishonoring his ancestors but also was depriving his son of his proper heritage. The German farmer is keeping faith with the past and with the future. He is conserving both natural and human resources. He has a philosophy of life which I wish were more common in the United States today.

German agriculture is less commercial than the agriculture of our Corn Belt or Cotton Belt. And what money the German farmer makes in good times is mostly plowed back into the farm, so to speak; a new house or barn is built, or a piece of land is drained, or better stock is bought. The German farmer does not retire to the county seat when old age draws near, as many farmers in the Corn Belt did before the depression, and as many farmers in the Cotton Belt did decades ago, and build a house that represents the savings of a lifetime. Instead the German "Vater" and "Mutter"

retire to a portion of the farm home, which is usually much larger and better built than farm homes in our Corn Belt, and a tenant or partnership contract is entered into with the son, who, with his family, occupies the remainder of the house. Sometimes a new house is built for the old folks or for the son. This son who later inherits the farm does not spend most of his life, and that of his wife also, digging and delving and saving to pay off the mortgage on the farm. He starts without debt, in a house that is usually built of brick, with a tile roof, and his savings are in turn used to improve the farm and educate the children./15 Over 90 percent of the farmhouses of Germany have electric light, and most of the houses we visited had tiled kitchens. Even the little 5- and 10-acre farms had better houses than most farms in our Corn Belt. The only extensive areas of the United States that can compare in farm buildings with those of Germany are southeastern Pennsylvania and portions of New England.

It took me several days to solve this riddle of how the big houses and barns in Germany could have been built out of the small farms and sometimes poor land. But soon I noticed over the entrance to the barn, painted in beautiful letters, a statement about as follows, "Built by Heinrich Schmidt, 1789." Some buildings were built as early as the seventeenth century, but more in the nineteenth. Slowly I came to realize that, perhaps, the grandfather built the brick walls, that the father tore off the thatch roof and replaced it with tile, and that the son has tiled the kitchen and put in electric light and running water. Each generation, so to speak, has climbed from the shoulders of the preceding generation, and wealth and culture have accumulated, instead of being dissipated by migration to the cities. When farmers in a district customarily retire to town and half the children go to the cities, as occurred in the United States during the decade before the depression, and these children must be paid their share of the estate by the son or tenant who takes over the farm, it is clear that much if not most of the value of farm property moves from the rural districts in each generation. The young man who starts operating a Corn Belt or Cotton Belt farm today, unless he inherits the farm, has a harder task before him in acquiring wealth than did the pioneer of years ago on the frontier, for he starts with a load of debt./16

/15 Prior to the Nazi revolution many farms in Germany were mortgaged. Not infrequently the money obtained was used to educate the "yielding" heirs, but the mortgage was generally paid off by the son who inherited the farm before his children in turn needed this expenditure for education. On farms now declared Erbhofs the debts are liquidated, generally in part or in whole by the government, and the law forbids such farms from again becoming security for debt. Loans to owners of Erbhofs must now be character loans, or based on other security than the land.

/16 Where the farm constitutes the major portion of the estate and where there are several children, as is generally the case, the alternative to debt is the division of the land, which would eventually result in small holdings, uneconomic in size, or the failure of some of the heirs to receive an equal share of the estate. The

If the youth on the farms could start life free from this debt, which is particularly heavy in agriculture because of the high ratio of investment to income, the farmers of the Corn Belt, of portions of the Wheat and Dairy Belts, in parts of the South and of the West within two or three generations might reach a level of culture and comfort such as the world has never known. For no other Nation in the world of equal magnitude has so fertile soils, so large a proportion of level or gently rolling land adapted to the use of machinery, a climate so favorable to the two most productive feed crops, corn and alfalfa, and a market of 50,000,000 urban people lying adjacent on the east and north with no tariff barriers between. Nature has been particularly gracious to the Corn Belt and many other portions of our country, but man has been taking nature's bounty and building out of it skyscrapers in the cities. Many of these skyscrapers are partially vacant, and unless the birth rate of the Nation soon rises, they will be less needed a half century hence than they are now. Nature

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writer suggests as a compromise the incorporation of the farm, a division of the shares of stock among the children, but with the heir who operates the farm paid a manager's salary, which should take precedence over dividends. In years of depression, or at other times, should the heirs who have left the farm need to seek shelter and sustenance, the homestead would provide a haven. This proposal has its weaknesses, which might be strengthened by legal provisions. Agreement by the heirs to sell the farm at half price to the brother or sister who wants it is a common form of adjustment in parts of the United States.

In the Wallaces' Farmer (February 25, 1938) a farmer writes: "When I inherited this farm from my father, it was valued at $30,000, but I had to pay $20,000 to the other heirs. It's taken most of my life to do it. Now I have three children. One will stay on the farm. Is it fair to him to treat him as father treated me, and make him spend a lifetime paying off the claims of the other children?"

The editor of Wallaces' Farmer then comments and offers a suggestion: "Every year, a part of many farms is moved to town. Fertility is sold off the farm, to provide funds to pay off heirs, pay interest and principal on mortgages, and supply cash for educating farm children who will later go to town.

"Part of the farm may be moved to town in the way indicated by the letter quoted above. In the period 1920-30, farmers did send about $4,000,000,000 to the cities to pay off city heirs of farm property.

"That much money would have paid off nearly one-half of the farm mortgages of the Nation.

"Instead, it went to build up the towns and cities.

"This movement is still going on. This year, hundreds of millions of farm dollars, that should be used to repair fences, build new houses and barns, buy new equipment, or settle farm debts, is being drained away to the cities in payments to nonresident heirs.

"How can it be stopped?

"Our friend whose letter we quote wants to stop it in order to be

has provided in the United States the basis for as fine a rural aristocracy as the World has ever known, but instead it is becoming a land of tenant farmers living in houses that are frequently little better than hovels.

The Family in Relation to Better Land Utilization

In considering the problems of conserving the soil resources of the United States, the problems of land utilization, and, more recently, the problems of agricultural prosperity and of national welfare, I have come to the conclusion that there is no substitute for the institution of the family. The Government can buy some of the land that is eroding, or land that has eroded badly, or is otherwise too poor to support a family in a decent manner, and convert this land into forest or grazing reserves. This should be done with millions of acres of land before it washes down into the river, causing floods and devastation. Fortunately a start is now being made by several Government agencies. But a much larger acreage of land must be used to grow crops, and undoubtedly most of these crops will be grown on privately owned land, as in the past.

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fair to his boy, who will stay on the farm. Others want it stopped in order to be fair to the farm as well as to the farmer.

"You can't pay for a farm over again in every generation and have much left with which to build up fertility, improve equipment and buildings, and develop good strains of livestock.

"Here is one suggestion to the puzzled farmer. Is it the answer our other readers would make?

"Let him provide for the farm and for his heirs in this way:

1. Have the farm appraised after his death and a fair rental set. From this rental, deduct the annual amount needed to cover taxes, repairs, and insurance. The boy on the farm is to look after these items. The balance of the rent is to be divided equally between all the heirs. The nonresident heirs are to accept the annual payments on a life basis as their share of the estate. Of course, if the mortgage is too big now, there may not be much to divide unless the present owner has done the sensible thing by carrying enough life insurance to cover the mortgage.
2. The boy on the farm is in charge of the place. He runs it in the way he thinks best. He is protected against high rentals in bad years by a provision shifting the rent up and down as farm prices rise or fall.
3. The other heirs enjoy their share of the rent through their lives, but they cannot pass it on to their children. When a nonresident heir dies, his share of the rent goes back to the man on the farm.
4. If the man on the farm improves it so that it produces more, the rent on the farm stays just where it was (after allowing for price shifts) at the time when he took it over. He gets credit for any increase in income resulting from his management and investments.

"We suggest that older farmers, especially those that have inherited burdened farms, think this over. Perhaps they can suggest better plans."

For the better utilization of our arable land I have full faith only in the family farm, and only in the case of the family with continuity of life and occupancy of the land. And continuity of family life and of land occupancy is dependent on a philosophy of life. There will not be, I think, much better utilization of farm land in most parts of the United States, until more farmers pass the farm on to their sons. It has been difficult enough in the past for a young man to climb the ladder, from hired man to tenant to owner of a farm, and it may be more difficult in the future because of low prices for farm products and the pressure of rural young people on the land. If the youth are unable to find work in the cities, they must work the land. They will work cheaply, and they will necessarily try to get as much as possible out of the land, unless it is given to them through inheritance and they can start, so to speak, at the top of the ladder; and expect, in turn, to pass the farm on to the next generation.

Farming as a Basis for Public Service

The acceptance by the American people of a set of values which will conserve both the natural and the human resources, is a task that will require several generations of time. The feeble efforts that I am contributing to this task I want my son to continue, and that he may be more effective in his efforts, I want him to have a farm as a basis for his work. Few can be as fortunate as I have been in finding a basis in a Government position, and opportunities in universities are not likely to increase as they did before the depression. Economic security is almost essential to the possession of the freedom and time and strength to undertake a task of this kind. And as divisions of opinion concerning the improvement of economic and social conditions become more acute, it may develop that the spirit of scientific freedom and toleration will diminish even in educational institutions.

The unencumbered ownership of the land is the ultimate assurance of freedom and economic security. Those farm families who voluntarily relinquish their hold on the land are, in most cases, selling their birthright. Recently I read an excellent study by a Chinese student, Mr. Shu-Ching Lee, of the so-called "agricultural ladder," that is, the phenomenon in the United States and other newer countries of young men starting in agriculture as laborers and slowly climbing through tenancy to the ownership of an unencumbered farm. Two sentences particularly impressed me; "The retreat from the land," he remarked, "is a purely American phrase. If there is any in other countries it is only negligible."/17 In other words, only American farmers retire to town, or relinquish except under extreme pressure, the ownership of the land. There was another

/17 Lee, Shu Ching. A Theory of the Agricultural Ladder, a thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, 1938, pages 31-32, on file in the Library of the University of Wisconsin. Mr. Lee uses the word "retreat" in the sense of retirement.

sentence in Mr. Lee's thesis that I should like to quote: "In the United States," he says, "parents might not feel guilty morally and psychologically as parents in the old countries did when they sold lands to others and did not hold them for their children."/18

The narrowing and lengthening of the agricultural ladder in the United States, the gradual loss of land ownership by farming people, and to an even greater extent by city people also, the rapid approach of a stationary and probably later declining national population, the condition of extensive unemployment, particularly of youth - these suggest to me that our Nation is rapidly developing the conditions that characterize many older nations. It appears to me probable that most of the farm families who are now losing the ownership of the land are losing it forever. Some of these families, particularly those who move to the larger cities, will probably die out; some will survive, dissolved in the urban proletariat; few, it seems to me, are likely to find such economic security, intellectual freedom, and peace of mind as they could have had on the farm.

I want my boy to be a farmer, for I am becoming increasingly convinced that the land is the foundation of the family and that the family is the foundation of the democratic state.

I want my daughters to be farmers also, for women can farm as well as men, and can serve their generation and nation too. Our oldest daughter, Helen, now 11 years old, has 250 hens and pullets and will sell this year about $1,200 worth of eggs. A third of these receipts will be pay for her labor, which does not average over 2½ hours a day. She has running water in the chicken house and brooder house with 5-foot sections of rain gutter to hold the water, and has boxlike feeders elevated above the floor to avoid contamination. The running water not only reduces danger from disease, but also reduces the labor of caring for the chickens fully one-half. Helen hires a student to clean the droppings boards weekly and hires her younger sister to help to deliver eggs. During the last school year, they delivered 17,000 eggs on their bicycles before and after school, and this year will deliver twice as many. With her mother's help (or more correctly I should say her mother with her help) she raised 300 chicks this spring without a single loss, except 3 that I let a window sash fall on, and on the same ground that she raised pullets last year. Such a record, I realize is not likely to be repeated.

The younger sister, Sabra, has several hives of bees and wants to have her own project of two milk goats next year, but her mother has not yet given permission, for goats must be milked regularly. Edwin says he wants a cow when he is big enough to care for her. The youngest daughter is only six, but has asked for a part of the egg route for herself. The children are, in this way, learning to meet people; learning about bacteriology and sanitation (they have a microscope); learning about proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, fats, and vitamins; learning a little about

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/18 See p. 82 of thesis cited in footnote 17.

genetics (the average was 216 eggs per hen last year); learning also economics and business methods, for a complete record of costs and sales is kept and graphs are made of production and prices. A monthly "stock-holders'" meeting, held around the dining-room table, gives each child opportunity to report on the project and receive dividends. We hope the children will, as a result, acquire a liking for intelligent labor, will learn to be dependable, will accumulate experience and funds, will pay their way through college, and then will be able to operate a farm, if they wish, instead of helplessly looking for work, as half of our youth are doing today.

DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each State extension director, county agricultural agent leader, home demonstration agent leader, and to each agricultural-college library and experiment-station library.

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Why I Want My Boy To Be a Farmer

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